

July 20, 2017

Dear Congressman Renacci:

I would like to share a story about my dad and his service during the Korean War. He was involved in an incident in late 1950 for which he was recommended to be awarded the Silver Star.

My Dad, SMSGT Harold R. Saal, (Ret) served in the United States Air Force through two wars. He was a waist gunner on a B-24 bomber crew in WWII and was serving as a jet aircraft crew chief at Hamilton AFB when the Korean War began. At the onset of the war, dad was deployed to Taegu, Korea and in the fall of 1950, he was called in by the C.O. and told that gunners were needed for the B-26 Invader. Since dad had had training on the B-24's he was asked if he would fly again. He volunteered and was sent to the Australian base in Iwakuni, Japan.

The B-26 Invader was a three crew aircraft with the pilot and bombardier located together in the enclosed cabin and the gunner located in a compartment behind the bomb bay. The gunner's seat circled a 360° track with remote sights that gave the gunner the use of both top and bottom turrets which contained four machine guns in all. There was a large armor plate opposite the seat that circled the track. In order to enter or exit the turret, a pin needed to be placed in the track to secure the plate and prevent it from closing the only point of exit through the bomb bay.

The missions out of Iwakuni were run mostly at night in order to allow the cover of darkness to provide some protection to the aircraft during their missions. Korea was divided into sections and each B-26 crew was assigned one of those sections with orders to search for targets of opportunity and in some instances, were given a specific military target to destroy. By the time dad's eighteenth mission rolled around, Seoul had been taken by the Chinese. During the course of that mission, they located a railhead north of Seoul where supplies were being unloaded. The ground was blanketed in snow which made the activity on the ground quite visible. They attacked the railhead at tree top level all the while dropping their bombs and firing their guns. The Chinese, who had guns set up around the railhead, returned fire. Dad's B-26 made a couple of passes at the railhead, however on their final pass, they were hit and their right engine was on fire. The pilot, Lt. Slattery, tried to feather the right engine and turned the aircraft to the south to try to escape. They flew as far as they could but were still behind enemy lines. The plane was going down and fire on the right wing was worsening. Since the fuel tanks in the wing were in danger of exploding, Lt. Slattery gave the order to bail out.

Dad was able to put the pin in the track and he successfully bailed out of the plane. His parachute deployed and he made it safely to the ground however, neither the pilot nor the bombardier were in sight. Dad witnessed the plane hitting the ground and exploding in a ball of fire just a couple of miles from where he came down. Dad removed his chute and started walking down a narrow valley. As he got to the valley floor he heard a commotion so he ducked down near a small path to conceal his position. Shortly thereafter, he saw a patrol of roughly 10 armed Chinese men in long coats heading toward the position of the B-26 wreckage. Dad stayed hidden

Days later, the bombardier was successfully rescued as well. Dad and the rest of the crew were sent to Tokyo for debriefing and since they had landed in enemy controlled territory, they were not permitted to fly any more missions and were ultimately sent home.

Dad never heard anything more about the Silver Star but he accomplished something truly miraculous on his eighteenth and final mission over Korea. As the gunner of a doomed B-26 Invader, he survived the impossible by successfully bailing out of that aircraft and he also successfully evaded capture behind enemy lines.

Thank you kindly for any help you could offer. My dad at the time held the rank of Staff Sergeant. His serial number was . If additional information is needed to assist in the investigation of this request, please feel free to contact me.

Kare-R Haley

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